

## Perfection of Wisdom ཡར་ཐུན། - *Phar Chin*

### Main Objects of Study in Tibetan Monastic Colleges - The *Five Great Canonical Texts*

In Tibetan monasteries traditionally there are five main objects of study, also called the *Five Great Canonical Texts*:

#### 1. **Prajnaparamita** or the Perfection of Wisdom ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོ་དུ་ཐུན་པ། - *She rab kyi Pha rol du*

*Chin pa* (*She rab*=wisdom, *kyi*=genitive, *Pha rol*=beyond/the other side, *du*=locative particle, *Chin pa*=gone)

or abbreviated: ཡར་ཐུན། *Phar Chin*

The implicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, which entails the study of the different meditational paths that lead to enlightenment.

#### 2. **Madhyamika** or Middle Way རྟུ་མ། - *Uma* (*Uma*=middle)

The explicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, which refers to the study of the middle way emptiness.

#### 3. **Pramanavartika** or epistemology རྟོག་མ་ནམ་འབྲེལ། - *Tshe ma Nam drel* (*Tshe ma*=valid cognition, *Nam drel*=commentary)

The study of logic - it teaches how to come to an understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

#### 4. **Abidharma** or phenomenology ཆོས་མངོན་པ་མཛོད། - *Choe Ngoen pa Dzoe*

(*Choe Ngoen pa*=higher knowledge, *Dzoe*=treasury)

or abbreviated: མཛོད། - *Dzoe*

The study of the different names and categories of phenomena.

#### 5. **Vinaya** or discipline འདུལ་བ། - *Duel wa* (*Duel wa*=discipline)

The study of monastic discipline.

## Wheel of Dharma

Sanskrit: *Dharma chakra*

Tibetan: ཆོས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ། - *Choe kyī Khorlo* (*Choe* = Dharma, *kyi* = genitive, *Khorlo* = Wheel)

From the time of his enlightenment at Bodhgaya until his death in Kushinagar Buddha Shakyamuni gave extensive teachings - he 'turned the Wheel of Dharma'. It is said there are 84,000 collections of discourses which the Buddha taught according to the diverse dispositions, inclinations and interests of sentient beings.

Of the numerous ways in which to classify those teachings, one of the most common ways is to classify them into the *Three Wheels of Dharma*.

English: Three Wheels of Dharma

Tibetan: ཆོས་འཁོར་གསུམ། *Choe Khor Sum* (*Choe* = Dharma, *Khor(lo)* = Wheel, *Sum* = three)

The wheel is an ancient Indian symbol. In the Buddhist context the wheel's swift motion symbolizes the rapid spiritual transformation revealed in the Buddha's teachings and as a weapon of change it represents the overcoming of all obstacles and obstructions.

Dharma has many different meanings:

1. phenomenon - definition: "that which holds/bears its own entity/nature."
2. Religion/spiritual system/ spiritual teachings or Buddhist religion/Buddhism/Buddhist teachings
3. Reality/Truth
4. Characteristic/property/quality/attribute
5. Topic
6. Knowledge

In the context of the Wheel of Dharma, Dharma refers to Buddhist teachings.

### Three Wheels of Dharma

**First Wheel** — Mainly Hinayana (fundamental vehicle) teachings given in the vicinity of Sarnath/Varanasi just after Buddha Shakyamuni's enlightenment, including his first teaching, the *Sutra on the Four Noble Truths* to his five ascetic disciples.

**Second Wheel** — Mainly Mahayana (universal vehicle) teachings given at the vicinity of Rajghir, including the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*.

**Third Wheel** — Mainly Mahayana teachings given in the vicinity of Vaishali and Shravasti towards the end of Buddha's life, including the *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* and the *Tathagathagarba Sutra*.

## Perfection of Wisdom Sutras

English: Wisdom that has gone beyond (literally: gone to the other side) / Perfection of Wisdom  
Sanskrit: *Prajnaparamita*

Tibetan: ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པ། - *She rab kyi Pha rol du Chin pa* (*She rab*=wisdom, *kyi*=genitive,

*Pha rol*=beyond/the other side, *du*=locative particle, *Chin pa*=gone)

English: Perfection of Wisdom Sutra

Tibetan: ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པའི་མདོ། / ཤེས་ཕྱིན་ཀྱི་མདོ། - *She rab kyi Pha rol du Chin pai Do/Sher Chin*

*gyi Do* (*Sher Chin*=abbreviation of *She rab kyi Pha rol du Chin pa*, *gyi*=genitive, *Do*=Sutra)

The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras that the Buddha taught during the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma is the principal genre of the Buddha's teachings. They flourish in many countries, including China - from where they were brought to Japan, Korea and Vietnam - and Tibet from where they were transmitted to Mongolia, the trans-Himalayan region and to areas within the Russian federation. In Tibet, the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras also became an important subject for study in the monastic colleges of all the four Tibetan traditions.

**The four Tibetan traditions:** རྟེན་མ། Nyingma, ས་སྐྱ། Sakya, བཀའ་བརྒྱུད། Kagyu, and དགེ་ལུགས། Gelug

The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras are also called "Sutras of the Venerable Mother". Here "Venerable Mother" refers to Prajna-Paramita, the female Buddha figure that represents wisdom. Prajna-Paramita is called "Venerable Mother" because like a mother gives birth to her children, wisdom gives birth to all Arya beings.

### Seventeen Mother and Son Sutras:

Tibetan: ཡུམ་སྐས་ཅུབ་དུན་གྱི་མདོ། - *Yum Sae Chub duen gyi Do* (*Yum*=mother, *Sae*=son,

*Chub duen*=seventeen, *gyi*=genitive, *Do*=sutra)

There are numerous different Perfection of Wisdom Sutras of various length. Seventeen of those were translated into Tibetan, one of them being, for instance, the *Heart Sutra*. These seventeen are collectively called the *Seventeen Mother and Son Sutras*.

## Ornament for Clear Realizations

### PART ONE – INTRODUCTION TO THE ORNAMENT

English: Ornament for Clear Realizations

Sanskrit: *Abisamaya-alamkara*

Tibetan: མངོན་རྟོགས་བྱེད། - *Ngoen Tog Gyen* (*Ngoen*=clear, *Tog*=realization, *Gyen*=ornament)

The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras explicitly teach emptiness and implicitly or in a hidden fashion the meditational paths leading to enlightenment. Nagarjuna in his *Six Compendia of Reasoning* expounded on the explicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras and Maitreya in his *Ornament for Clear Realizations* expounded on the implicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.

## The Principal Sutra Sources of the Ornament

Tibetan: མངོན་རྟོགས་བྱེད་གྱི་འགན་བྱ་ཙ་པའི་མདོ། - *NgoenTog Gyen gyi She ja Tsa wai Do* (*Ngoen*=clear, *Tog*=realization, *Gyen*=ornament, *She ja Tsa wai Do*=principal Sutra source)

Even though the Ornament is a commentary of all the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, its principal Sutra sources are:

1. (The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in) **One Hundred Thousand** (Verses) འབུམ། - *Bum*
2. (The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in) **Twenty Thousand** (Verses) ཉི་ཁྲི། - *Nyi Tri*
3. (The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in) **Eight Thousand** (Verses) བརྒྱད་ཕྱེད་པ། - *Gyae Tong ba*

## The Twenty-One Commentaries

There are twenty-one Indian commentaries on the Ornament that are deemed most important and were therefore translated into Tibetan. Those commentaries are also commentaries of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. However, some of those correlate the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras with the Ornament (twelve commentaries) and some don't (nine commentaries).

## The Eight Clear Realizations

Tibetan: མངོན་རྟོགས་བརྒྱད། - *Ngoen Tog Gyae* (*Ngoen*=clear, perfect, *Tog*=realization, *Gyae*=eight)

The Ornament has eight chapters and each of those chapters explains one 'clear realization'. The eight clear realizations are:

1. **Exalted Knower of Aspects** (omniscient mind of a Buddha) རྣམ་མཁྲིན། - *Nam khyen* (*Nam*=aspect, *khyen*=exalted knower)
2. **Knower of Paths** ལམ་ཤེས། - *Lam she* (*Lam*=path, *she*= knower)

**3. Knower of Bases** གཞི་ཤེས། - *Zhi she* ( *Zhi=basis, she=basis*)

**4. Application in Complete Aspects** རྣམ་ཐོག་སྤྲོས་བ། - *Nam dzog Jor wa* (*Nam=aspect, dzog=complete, Jor wa=application, preparation, exertion*)

**5. Peak Application** ཅེ་མོའི་སྤྲོས་བ། - *Tse moi Jor wa* (*Tsemoi=peak, Jor wa=application*)

**6. Serial Application** མཐར་གྱིས་སྤྲོས་བ། - *Thar gyi Jor wa* (*Thar gyi= Serial, Jor wa=application*)

**7. Application in a Single Instant** ཀླད་ཅིག་སྤྲོས་བ། - *Kae cig Jor wa* (*Kae cig=single instant, Jor wa=application*)

**8. Resultant Dharmakaya** (truth body) འབྲས་བུ་ཚོས་སྤྲོས་བ། - *Dre bu Choe ku* (*Dre bu=result, Choe ku=dharmakaya*)

## The Seventy Topics

Tibetan: དོན་བདུན་བཅུ། - *Doen Dun chu* (*Doen=topic, meaning, object, Dun chu=seventy*)

Each clear realization is further characterized by different phenomena. For example, the first clear realization, the exalted knower of aspects is characterized by ten phenomena. Those phenomena are also called topics. Therefore:

The **first** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***exalted knower of aspects*** by way of **ten** topics.

The **second** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***knower of paths*** by way of **eleven** topics.

The **third** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***knower of bases*** by way of **nine** topics.

The **fourth** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***application in complete aspects*** by way of **eleven** topics.

The **fifth** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***peak application*** by way of **eight** topics.

The **sixth** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***serial application*** by way of **thirteen** topics.

The **seventh** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***application in a single instant*** by way of **four** topics.

The **eighth** chapter of the Ornament explains the ***resultant dharmakaya*** by way of **four** topics.

In total the Ornament expounds on seventy topics which is why it is said that the Ornament explains the implicit or hidden meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras by way of ***eight clear realizations*** and ***seventy topics***.

